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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KRENKEL (Austria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 94: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/47/38, A/47/82-S/23512, A/47/88-S/23563, A/47/340, 368, 377, 391, 508 and 564)

1. Mr. KONIG (Observer for the European Community), explaining that his statement was additional to that given by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that, in the context of its third medium-term action programme, the Commission of the European Communities had continued its work aimed at consolidating the legal framework with regard to equal opportunities for men and women. In October 1992, it had therefore adopted a European Council directive on improving the protection and health of pregnant women at work, women who had recently given birth and women who were breast-feeding. In November 1992, it had also adopted a recommendation and code of practice on the protection of the dignity of women and men at work, which dealt in particular with the problem of combating sexual harassment, while the European Council itself had adopted a declaration with a view to developing and implementing coherent and integrated policies in that respect. Finally, the European Conference on access to equality in the European Community had had two clear goals: first, to raise the level of awareness of members of the legal profession who wished to be informed but who were not necessarily specialists; and secondly, to reflect together on the 10 points submitted to the Commission for promoting its policy in respect of equality.

2. Regarding the integration of women in the labour market, a Community initiative programme, known as NOW, which aimed to promote equal opportunities for women in the field of employment and vocational training, had had a promising start. All its operational programmes, including supplementary measures to provide participants with child care, had been approved by the member States. Moreover, in 1992, a women's vocational training network, known as IRIS, had organized a fair which had provided an opportunity to take stock of activities and to pinpoint priority actions to respond to the needs of post-Maastricht Europe. The lessons learnt across the Community regarding women in employment made it possible for a strategy to be defined now to improve the situation of women during the third action programme and beyond.

3. In addition, the network entitled "Women and Employment" had carried out important research on the segregation of the labour market in the European Community. A report on the situation in the 12 member States would be published in early 1993. Finally, the Commission lent its support to a conference, organized by the Danish Ministry for Social Affairs, on the theme of reconciling employment and caring for children in the Nordic countries and the States members of the European Community.

4. As equal opportunities for women in employment went hand in hand with improving their status in society, a new network, named "Women in the Decision-Making Process", was currently producing a panorama of women's positions in decision-making posts throughout the Community, as well as

(Mr. König, Observer, European Community)

developing a line of rational argument for increasing women's participation in that sphere. During the first phase, it would focus on three key areas: decision-making in politics, in trade unions and in the public sector. A major campaign would be launched to increase public awareness, and a charter, developed from the argument, would be released at a summit on women in power due to take place in Athens in November 1992.

5. The Commission, notably through the work of a steering committee for equal opportunities in broadcasting, continued its work to promote new images of women and men in the media industry. In that context, a programme was launched in 1992 to co-finance audio-visual productions dealing with equal opportunities.

6. In the European Commission, an internal action programme for staff was to attempt to ensure that, by 1994, women would hold 14 per cent of the Commission's A-grade (or professional) positions. It would be accompanied by measures to promote career development and reconcile domestic and professional responsibilities, and would also address the issue of recruiting women in other grades. In the same way, efforts were likely to be made to increase the number of male secretaries, typists and clerical assistants. The Commission believed that all advocates of equality should advance equality within their own walls if their advocacy was to be followed by others.

7. The integration of women in development operations was among the priorities of the Commission, which had accordingly published a handbook containing sectoral guidelines specifically dealing with the integration of women in the projects and programmes which it financed. Under its general guidelines for financial and technical cooperation with developing countries in Latin America for 1991-1995, the Community had taken steps to ensure that the projects and programmes were not detrimental to the situation of women, and that specific measures had been adopted to involve them on an equal footing in the productive process, social activities and decision-making. The only way to succeed in integrating women in the development process was to promote recognition of the important economic and social role of women and to make the appropriate resources available.

8. Ms. McLENNAN (United States of America) said that she believed that the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies could promote the expansion of democracy throughout the world. While progress towards democracy had admittedly been made since the 1970s, real democracy could not be attained without advancing the status of women. The United Nations could not therefore be satisfied with too much lip service at the expense of real commitment. She asked when the principles of the United Nations Charter concerning equality of opportunities would be applied.

(Ms. McLennan, United States)

9. On the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in 1995, each country should undertake an internal review of what remained to be accomplished. However, the United Nations Secretariat and all the specialized agencies should also initiate the same kind of internal review process. The General Assembly's endorsement of resolution 40/108 had given the Commission on the Status of Women the mandate to monitor implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies on a system-wide basis. Her delegation welcomed the report by the International Civil Service Commission on the status of women in the United Nations system (A/47/30), as it emphasized practical measures likely to produce tangible results. In addition, since 1970, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and the specialized agencies had adopted numerous decisions and resolutions aimed at improving the status of women. Unfortunately, for the most part, those had been ignored. In such circumstances, she asked when the Organization would be held accountable for its actions.

10. The action programme for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat was an extremely useful document in that it raised the question of the equality of opportunity upon which the Organization was founded. While it was true that the percentage of women in geographically distributed posts had increased somewhat (from 23.1 per cent in 1985 to 29.2 per cent in 1991), the percentage at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels had declined (7.3 per cent in 1985; 4.9 per cent in 1989 and currently 2.9 per cent). In view of the seriousness of the situation, the action plan must be implemented, together with the policy measures recommended by the Steering Committee and agreed to by the Secretary-General in December 1991. Her delegation welcomed the recommendation that departmental targets be set at each section and that the performance of managers be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in improving the situation in their departments. It also welcomed the initiation of a career development system which would benefit men and women, and the maintaining of rosters by occupation and rosters of women. But the report also stated that the attainment of equality between men and women in the Secretariat required continued intensified efforts on the part of the administration, programme managers and Member States. Currently, however, there was no tangible evidence of leadership from the leadership of the Organization to effect those changes. There were no women serving as Under-Secretaries-General and by 1 March 1993 there would be no women at the Assistant Secretary-General level either. Given the objectives established in the General Assembly's resolutions on the Improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, the situation was unacceptable.

11. The Forward-looking Strategies emphasized the need to focus on the legal literacy of women. Legal literacy should be seen as an important component of all programmes for the advancement of women; programmes should be based on the authentic needs and concerns of women and be designed to eliminate discrimination based on gender, age, cultural or ethnic background. While the formal right to equality existed in most countries, real equality in women's lives had not been achieved, thus preventing women from participating fully in

(Ms. McLennan, United States)

all levels of society. The law, even when written to protect women, did not automatically make them equal to men at the socio-economic level. There were still conflicts between customary law and the statutory legal system, due to entrenched customary practices which kept women from exercising their rights. Legislation which "protected women" should be reviewed periodically to determine whether it was actually helping or hindering the advancement of women. Legal literacy was an educational process which contributed to equality, peace, justice and development for women and men. A holistic perspective on women's rights should be developed linking economic, cultural, social and legal issues.

12. Special attention should be paid to women who lived in extreme poverty. Short- and long-term development planning should incorporate gender awareness, since economic development did not automatically lead to equitable distribution of benefits to women and men. Women were currently disproportionately represented among the poor and their needs needed to be closely examined. New strategies and programmes for women needed to be established in order to ensure equal treatment with men. Income maintenance alone was not the cure for poverty; policies that fostered women's self-sufficiency and independence and allowed them to participate in economic growth and social development should be introduced.

13. The Commission on the Status of Women would continue to prepare for the 1995 World Conference on Women and would endeavour to strengthen and clarify its mandate on communications. If within the next two years, the Commission on the Status of Women had not received enough communications to allow it to determine trends and patterns of discrimination against women, it ran the risk of losing its effectiveness.

14. Her delegation applauded the excellent work of the drafting group working on a declaration on the elimination of violence against women. It hoped that the draft declaration would make its way quickly through the United Nations system so that it could be adopted as it stood at the next meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council. In that event, at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the United Nations, by consensus, would express its abhorrence of violence against women.

15. Mrs. ANSELMI (Italy) thanked the Secretary-General for his excellent report (A/47/377) to the Committee outlining the goals to be reached between now and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

16. The status of women had improved all over the world, and in Italy as well, where 50 years of democracy had eliminated discrimination against women. Nevertheless, new laws adopted to benefit women needed to be brought into line with social and cultural changes if they were to be effective. In fact, women had to fight to ensure that rights protected by law were fully respected in reality. Thus, a law adopted in 1970 which provided for paid maternity leave for salaried women, was extended in 1991 to self-employed and

(Mrs. Anselmi, Italy)

professional women. If violations occurred, those women had the possibility to file a complaint. The National Commission for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities recently published a compilation of all laws promulgated since 1943 promoting gender equality, which had since been issued in a number of countries and become something of a success. Furthermore, the activities of women's groups, in particular associations of women lawyers, women judges and women journalists, as well as political movements and unions had been particularly effective in identifying violations. The National Commission for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities played an essential role in translating legislation into practice in everyday life. The Commission was also studying ways to evaluate the actual impact of legislation on the status of women.

17. With regard to the question of development, she commended the Secretary-General for his report (A/47/377) which stated that economic development was not gender-neutral. In a period of economic crisis, it was women who suffered the most. They lost their jobs, had lower salaries and faced difficulties in combining careers with raising children. In Italy, there was an acute problem of development in the South, where female unemployment had reached 28 per cent (13 per cent nationwide). Several laws had been enacted over the past few years in an attempt to rectify that situation, in particular, a law establishing management training programmes. A special fund had been created to finance those programmes, providing loans to women owners of one or more enterprises that employed primarily women. Mention should also be made of a law aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination in the workplace.

18. In Italy, most of the elderly were women. Because of the system of pensions and services for the elderly, they had an acceptable standard of living. In addition, the State granted a minimum pension to women over 65 whose length of employment did not qualify them for a pension. Other social measures (free housing in retirement homes, financial assistance) had also been adopted to cope with the problem. The time had come for the Europe of the Twelve to speed up the process of coordinating social policy.

19. The chapter of the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/377) entitled "Peace: Women and the peace process" was very interesting in that it did not limit the discussion to the participation of women in the armed forces.

20. In Italy, the participation of women in the struggle against fascism and nazism had won them recognition of their political and civil rights. Aware that peace was not only the absence of war, but the building, day after day, of a more free and just society for all, Italian women had never demanded access to the armed forces. However, the question of their admission was currently being debated in the Italian Parliament. If the latter so decided, they would be free to enter such careers if they wished.

21. Now that the division of the world into spheres of influence decided at Yalta had come to an end, it was necessary to forge an international community

(Mrs. Anselmi, Italy)

in the service of peace. Therefore, the United Nations must pursue its initiatives and strengthen its purpose of promoting a global peace policy. It was deplorable that women were insufficiently represented, indeed they were excluded, from both national and international bodies concerned with the maintenance of peace.

22. Mr. LUNA (Peru) said that, in order to strengthen the reactivated role of the United Nations since the end of East-West tensions, it was imperative to give the same priority to development problems as to security issues, and to achieve a balance in the functioning of the various bodies of the United Nations system. In that context, the Secretariat should constitute the vanguard of the restructuring process and should stimulate change by becoming a cohesive structure capable of giving due attention to the different political, socio-economic, environmental and security factors that form the basis of a common strategy for peace and development.

23. To meet that challenge, restructuring efforts should result in practical measures, particularly in the social field. The participation of women in the formulation and execution of specific policies and programmes could be the catalyst between the new international order and the realities in the field. In their daily struggle to improve living conditions for the family, community and country, women gave meaning to the ideals of universality, development, human rights, peace and security expressed in the United Nations Charter. Whatever their geographical origin and cultural background, they were better equipped than anyone to analyse development problems and trends, raise awareness of the most urgent needs and promote the common interest.

24. In its programmes the United Nations must take into account the pioneering role of women and ensure that they are adequately represented throughout the system, particularly at the highest levels, so that they could direct its efforts towards the countries and groups with the greatest need. He welcomed the appointment of women to the high-level advisory board established by the Secretary-General and hoped that women would also participate in the Commission on Sustainable Development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio had highlighted the fact that women, environment and development were inextricably linked.

25. UNIFEM had not only contributed to greater awareness of the situation of women, but had carried out its mandate with dynamism, foresight, flexibility and sensitivity. In its work, it was given to direct dialogue and a holistic view of problems. In spite of the prejudices on the matter, advancement of women was undoubtedly the only issue in international relations that was not affected by the traditional divisions between North and South.

26. Peruvian women had endorsed the ideals of the United Nations Charter and the goals defined by UNIFEM when it was established. The Peruvian woman was dynamic, capable of directing and organizing her life and to exert a decisive influence on the family, community and country. With the support of the

(Mr. Luna, Peru)

majority of Peruvians, she was promoting a concept of development focused on the human being and self-reliance. Consequently, Peruvian women had helped to promote better use of human potential and effective power-sharing. They had also been affected by the terrorism rampant in Peru, and many women activists had fallen victim to the Shining Path forces.

27. He hoped that the United Nations would consider the hopes and needs of the women of his country and would reach agreement on global strategies and specific measures for their advancement. His delegation attached the greatest importance to the convening of the next World Conference on Women and hoped that sufficient resources would be allocated to ensure the success of its work.

28. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the press release of 28 October mentioning that currently 117 States were parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He invited those which were not parties to contact their Governments, if need be, urging them to ratify or sign the Convention before the end of the current session.

29. Ms. VANNINI (Nicaragua) said that the Government headed by Mrs. Violeta Barrios Chamorro, President of Nicaragua, had taken a whole series of measures to respond to the urgent needs and demands of Nicaraguan women, who made up more than 50 per cent of the population and had suffered great hardship during the war. In particular, a law had been passed entitling mothers to receive a food allowance for their children and requiring fathers to pay the cost. That law represented progress compared with earlier legislation because it covered both children born out of wedlock and children who had not been legally recognized by their fathers. There had also been some reforms of the criminal code favourable to women. In cases such as the rape of a minor, for example, the law took into account extenuating circumstances and provided more severe penalties. In other cases, it no longer recognized being under the influence of alcohol or drugs as an extenuating circumstance.

30. In addition, the Government had redoubled its efforts at the institutional level to safeguard the rights of women and eliminate all forms of discrimination, both in law and in practice. One of the most important results achieved in that regard had been the restructuring and revitalization of the Nicaraguan Institute of Women, whose members had held cabinet office since 1991. The twofold objective of the Nicaraguan Government was to promote more active participation by women in social policy-making in Nicaragua and, to that end, to eliminate sexual stereotyping by means of information campaigns. The campaigns envisaged would focus on enhancing the status of housework, on women's right to participate in the country's economic, social, cultural and political activities and to have access to education and health, and on creating the conditions for effective implementation of women's rights.

(Ms. Vannini, Nicaragua)

31. Activities carried out by the Institute since its revitalization had consisted in drawing up a programme for the advancement of women which was to be implemented in the country's 144 municipalities. Priority was to be given to women heads of households, of whom there were many in Nicaragua both because of the armed conflict, which had taken a severe toll among men, and because increasing numbers of men were failing to fulfil their family responsibilities. In addition, the Institute was engaged in various activities aimed at (i) providing support for the national reconciliation and rehabilitation programme; (ii) supporting the formulation and follow-up of social policy; (iii) preventing violence in the family and protecting women who were the victims of such violence; (iv) establishing "self-esteem" workshops; (v) implementing a programme devoted to "women, environment and development", in which priority would be given to rural areas; and (vi) the establishment of a data bank on women.

32. Government action at the institutional level was also evident from the establishment in 1992 of a national commission to combat violence against women. The commission, which consisted of senior officials, was responsible at the national level for combating all forms of violence against women and children, and was supported in its work by various non-governmental organizations and national and international associations.

33. Finally, it should also be mentioned that in November 1991 the First Ladies of the Central American countries had held their fifth meeting, which had been devoted to the topic: "Women, environment and development" and had led to the elaboration and implementation of a regional programme on that subject.

34. Referring to the Secretary-General's report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (A/47/340), she said that Nicaragua welcomed the efforts of UNIFEM to ensure a greater role for women in international forums in order to enable them to promote their interests, as in the case of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It also welcomed UNIFEM's cooperation in regard to the participation of women in agricultural activities, but hoped that the financial and other support provided by the Fund in Central American countries would increase, bearing in mind the fact that the status of women in that region was particularly unsatisfactory, due to such factors as poverty, wars, natural disasters and the adverse consequences of structural adjustment programmes in their initial stage.

35. Her delegation wished to stress the importance of the 1995 World Conference on Women, and pointed out that, in its view, programmes aimed at making women economically independent could only achieve their goals if they were accompanied by campaigns to promote greater awareness among men of the role played by women in a country's development and the need to accord them the status they needed to take their proper place in the life of society.

36. Mr. YIBOKOU (Togo) said that for more than half a century the United Nations had been concerned with promoting the status of women and had taken many initiatives in that connection, such as the establishment of the Committee on the Status of Women, the adoption of various declarations and conventions, the proclamation of International Women's Year and the holding of two world conferences on women, one at Copenhagen in 1980 and the other at Nairobi in 1985, which had seen the adoption of a pragmatic programme of action in the form of the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000. By participating in the current debate, his delegation intended to reaffirm its commitment to the advancement of women and to make its contribution to measures aimed at the full integration of women in development and their participation in decision-making at national and international levels.

37. He welcomed the efforts made by the United Nations Development Fund for Women in connection with access to education, health care, land, technology and credit, and the enjoyment of their basic rights, and hoped that the Fund would expand its programmes for promoting the participation of women in international forums and improving their access to information regarding their own status and their opportunities for action.

38. Greater coordination of activities at national, regional and international levels would promote implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, and his delegation hoped that particular attention would be devoted to four specific areas of activity.

39. Recognizing that greater awareness on the part of women of their rights was one of the preconditions for the success of the Nairobi Strategies, he expressed the hope that further information campaigns would be organized on issues relating to women's day-to-day life and that priority would be accorded to functional literacy programmes.

40. In order to strengthen the authority of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, States that had not yet done so should be encouraged to become Parties to the Convention. With regard to States which had entered reservations to the Convention, Togo supported the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the context of the preparatory work for the World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in 1993, namely that the States parties concerned should be invited to reconsider their reservations with a view to withdrawing them and instituting a procedure similar to that provided for in the case of human rights instruments.

41. He stressed the importance of the periodic reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention. It was to be hoped that those reports, if necessary prepared with the assistance of the competent bodies of the United Nations, would be regularly submitted, would clearly identify the obstacles encountered in implementing the Convention and would include information regarding prevention and protection measures adopted in order to

eliminate violence against women, in accordance with recommendation 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

42. With regard to preparations for the World Conference on Women to be held in 1995, his delegation thought that the issues which the Commission on the Status of Women proposed to place on the Conference agenda were judiciously chosen. If the Conference was to achieve its objective of appraising the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies, it was necessary to set up an efficient mechanism to coordinate the work of national preparatory committees and to ensure that the preparatory regional meetings gave consideration to the role of women in sustainable development, the elimination of negative images of women, and major obstacles to the advancement of women. Rural women and non-governmental organizations should be associated with the preparatory process and with the holding of the Conference which, moreover, should receive extensive media coverage.

43. His delegation shared the view of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that the question of equal treatment of men and women in respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms should appear on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights to be held in 1993.

44. The Togolese Government, affirming its will to enhance the participation of women in the development process and to ensure that women played their part in the management of affairs of the State, had in 1977 set up a General Directorate on the Status of Women, later transformed into the Ministry of Social Affairs and of the Status of Women. Among the activities conducted by Togolese women since that date, mention should be made of awareness and mobilization campaigns among women with a view to their advancement; focusing on the women's component in development programmes and projects; promotion of women's production groups; creation of income-generating activities; manufacture and distribution of improved cooking hearths; and the preparation of a Code to govern individual and family Life.

45. Mr. AROSEMENA (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Central American Group, said that the status of women was less satisfactory in countries not parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women than in countries party to the Convention, and therefore urged States which had not yet acceded to the Convention to do so.

46. The status of women remained by and large unsatisfactory because of the worsening economic crisis and of the continuing existence of traditional obstacles to the advancement of women in society. That was the conclusion of the book entitled The World's Women: 1970-1990 published jointly by the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Fund for the Development of Women, which expressed the view that women were still far from being on an equal footing with men in terms of political power, as well as remuneration for work and equality of opportunities.

(Mr. Arosemena, Panama)

47. As developing countries, the countries of Central America wished to stress the obligation of solidarity with women in the world's poorest regions incumbent upon the international community, and particularly upon the wealthy countries. They also appealed to the international community to implement effectively the international instruments on women adopted since 1975, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and pointed out the need to undertake a full appraisal of the results of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and to study the situation of women living in rural and marginal areas and involved in mass migrations.

48. Discrimination against women was a particularly serious matter considering the role of women in raising and educating children, who were, after all, the future human resources of a country. In that respect, he emphasized that the educational systems of Central American countries had been expanded and improved and that women had benefited from those advances. They continued, however, to suffer discrimination in the educational sphere for two reasons, the first being that in the higher stages of education women continued to be oriented toward traditionally "feminine" careers and the second, that stereotypes of the roles of men and women in society - and therefore the model of feminine submission to men - were perpetuated in the educational programmes.

49. As regards the place of women in the world of labour, it had to be noted that women had always played an important role in the development process of Central American countries, even if that role was not always recognized because of sexist values. Women's participation in the development process was improving, but it would still be difficult to affirm that responsibilities were being shared in a just and efficacious manner between men and women in the home and within society. The greater participation of women in the world of employment was due to a number of factors - the will to improve their status, which in turn was due to their improved educational level; the economic situation, which frequently necessitated a second wage coming into the household; and the fact that women often had to provide for their children alone, as family heads. It also had to be noted that their remuneration level was well below that of men although they were often better educated and although unemployment, an acute problem in Central America, affected women far more than men.

50. Turning to the question of women's participation in political life, a determining factor in their advancement, he said that generally speaking opportunities for women to draw attention to their specific problems and to take part in the decision-making process remained limited. Although women in most countries enjoyed the full range of political rights, positions of responsibility and decision-making were in the overwhelming majority of cases held by men; that was true even in the developed countries, where women occupied, at best, a third of such posts. There had been little development in that respect in the countries of Central America. However, it was

(Mr. Arosemena, Panama)

encouraging to note that the Nicaraguans had elected a woman to the presidency of their Republic in 1990 and that a Guatemalan woman had received the Nobel Peace Prize on 16 October 1992. He also wished to point out that in Panama, 49 governmental organizations concerned with the advancement of women had set up a National Women's Council to deal with the most urgent problems facing Panamanian women, crime first and foremost.

51. The countries of Central America recognized the fundamental role played by the United Nations in matters relating to women and development but considered that, by virtue of an integrated, multidisciplinary and prejudice-free approach, women's problems should be assigned a more important place in the Organization's operational activities in the development field.

52. Mr. LI Daoyu (China) said that it was clear from the annual report on their implementation (A/47/377) that the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had become a global programme of action and that their objectives of equality, development and peace would only be achieved if the necessary effort continued to be made at the international, regional and national levels, particularly in developing countries where the situation of women remained vulnerable because of poverty and illiteracy.

53. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had just considered the Chinese Government's second report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention had been ratified or acceded to by 119 countries, thereby demonstrating the growing importance attached to equal rights for women throughout the world. China had passed a law on the protection of the rights and interests of women, in force since October 1992, which gave concrete expression to the various stipulations on equality of men and women contained in the Constitution in the areas of politics, culture, education, work, property, the person, marriage and the family and the elimination of discrimination against women. Penalties for violations were expressly provided.

54. The Government and the people of China, especially women, would have the great honour of hosting the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995 in accordance with resolution 36/8 of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Conference would be devoted to the second review of the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies and the formulation of a programme of action for follow-up efforts to the end of the decade. His Government had established a Chinese Organizing Committee composed of principal leaders from more than 30 bodies, including 26 ministries and commissions of the State Council, press agencies, the Beijing municipal government and mass organizations. State Councillor Mr. Li Tieying was the Chairman, and the Vice-chairmen were the Secretary-General of the State Council (also Secretary-General of the Committee) and one official from each of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the municipal government of Beijing and the All-China Women's Federation. The main tasks of the Committee would be to

(Mr. Li Daoyu, China)

prepare for the Conference and to devise a national mobilization plan. The Chinese Government was fully prepared to cooperate closely with other Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure that the Conference ran smoothly. It would provide an opportunity to exchange experience, strengthen cooperation and explore new avenues to achieve the objectives of the Strategies, and thus to promote the advancement of women, world peace and development.

55. Mr. SLABY (Czechoslovakia) said that his country attached great importance to the question of equality between the sexes and to the elimination of discrimination against women. It highly appreciated the efforts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in that field. With regard to that form of discrimination, the second periodic report of Czechoslovakia on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been prepared before the re-establishment of democracy and the transition to a market economy in November 1989. Therefore, it did not reflect the changes in the social situation since that time. The report had been revised, but still did not provide a true picture of the current status of women in the social, political and economic spheres. The preparation of an updated third periodic report for submission to the Committee in early 1993 was currently under way.

56. The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic had taken part for the first time, as a Member State, in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-sixth session. It had welcomed its membership as an opportunity to participate in an exchange of views among States which already had sophisticated legislation governing the question of the equal status of women as well as States which had not yet reached the stage of incorporating such laws into their legislation.

57. Considering that women in general, especially in developing countries, were highly vulnerable to economic problems, Czechoslovakia greatly appreciated the activities of UNESCO, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) for the emancipation of women and their integration into development. His country was aware of women's indispensable role in a democratic society and fully complied with United Nations resolutions emphasizing the need to support women in order to permit their broadest possible participation in economic, social, cultural, and political life. In that context, his Government had prepared a draft amending the guidelines on the implementation of the rights of women. Unfortunately, its consideration had had to be postponed because of the country's political difficulties.

58. As indicated in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000, one of the ways in which Governments could promote the broadest possible participation of women in all spheres of society consisted in calling on the experience and expertise of United Nations agencies and programmes to increase the awareness of their rights among women

(Mr. Slaby, Czechoslovakia)

themselves. Towards that end, in May 1992, Czechoslovakia had hosted the expert group meeting to examine ways to increase women's awareness of their rights, including legal literacy, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Office at Vienna. The implementation of the recommendations adopted at that meeting should become a stimulus to the incorporation of issues regarding the equal status of women into national legislation.

59. As noted by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council during their deliberations, the goals stated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had not been achieved. Czechoslovakia was ready to make the necessary effort to implement the recommendations of those bodies, and particularly to submit more women candidates for vacant professional posts in the Secretariat of United Nations organizations.

60. His delegation attached great importance to the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 as an opportunity to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Czechoslovakia was certain that, during the current times of major political and socio-economic change, that Conference not only would assist in resolving the problems of women, but would also have a positive influence on the direction and impact of those changes.

61. Mr. AL-DOSARI (Bahrain) said that, while welcoming genuine efforts reflected in the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 (A/47/377), the studies and research should be continued with the aim of arriving at recommendations for achieving the goals set for the advancement of women, and account should be taken, in fulfilling those goals, of the traditions and customs forming the background to women's life.

62. His country supported the activities of the Commission on the Status of Women and the vital role it played in implementing the Strategies. The idea of organizing in 1995 a world conference on women had generated wide support, which had taken shape in Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/12 and General Assembly resolution 46/98. He thanked the Chinese Government for its proposal to act as host to the Beijing Conference, and hoped that the collective efforts of Member States and the competent bodies of the United Nations would ensure that the Conference could be held expeditiously and that it would achieve its stated objectives.

63. In the spirit of the Shari'a (which made provision for the protection of women and respect for their dignity), Bahrain had incorporated in its Constitution a number of provisions, including article 18, which affirmed the equality of all citizens before the law, without discrimination as to gender. Men and women enjoyed equal opportunities in all aspects of life, including health-care and education. Women's access to education had led to a marked

(Mr. Al-Dosari, Bahrain)

decline in illiteracy in that social group and official statistics indicated that the number of women completing primary education and going on to higher-level studies was increasing every year. The country's cultural and social institutions played an important role, supplementing the efforts of the authorities, in initiating literacy programmes for women. In conclusion, it should be mentioned that women held senior posts in the private, public and banking sectors.

64. Ms. HASSANI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it was crucial to improve women's social status in the light of their impact on the development process. Among the major factors affecting the advancement of women, mention should be made of education and greater awareness of their rights, which would enable them to participate more actively in public life and which, on another level, would contribute to the betterment of humanity as a whole. The nature and quality of women's education had a deep impact on the upbringing of children, economic productivity, and reduction in the population growth-rate, which would ultimately determine the general quality of life. It was for that reason that Governments and the international community had a threefold duty to improve the status of women, in terms of their education, health and employment, and to ensure that they participated in development policies.

65. It was vitally important that women were protected from the violence to which they were subjected in all parts of the world; violence had had the inevitable result of depriving them of their basic rights and liberties, thus impeding realization of the objectives of the United Nations Decade for the Advancement of Women: Equality, Development and Peace. From that standpoint, the status of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine and occupied South Lebanon, where torture, massacre and other violent crimes were widespread, was all the more deplorable. Implementation of the Nairobi Strategies at a global level would be possible only if there were comprehensive and continuous endeavours by the international community in a climate of tranquillity, without which efforts could not bear fruit, in which actions should take the place of words, and conventions were implemented.

66. In her country, women took part on the same basis as men in all educational, research and political activities. The Government was devoted to increasing the number of women in decision-making positions and political life, on the guidelines established by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-sixth session in its resolution E/CN.6/1992/L.15. Girls currently accounted for 46 per cent of Iranian students, a proportion which the Government intended to raise to 50 per cent. It was also Iran's policy to expand the programme of higher education. Increased and better opportunities of employment were being made available to women. In the summer of 1992, the Women's Social and Cultural Council had prepared a comprehensive plan on the rights of working women in the Islamic Republic with regard to equal employment opportunities and equal pay for equal work. The opportunity in certain cases to choose working-hours was being considered in the High Cultural Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Council would submit

(Ms. Hassani, Islamic Republic of Iran)

its proposals to the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Women currently accounted for 35 per cent of staff in the public service. A number of government offices - the Women's International Affairs Department (in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Women's Affairs Bureau (in the Islamic Consultative Assembly), and such non-governmental organizations as the Women's Society, the Women's Islamic Institute and the Zainab Society - were focusing on matters relating to women. The Women's Affairs Bureau, which had recently been established and was attached to the office of the President, was responsible for protecting women, guaranteeing their civil rights and promoting them to decision-making posts. The office was headed by a woman, who was also responsible for advising the President on matters of concern to women.

67. Her Government was of the view that there should be greater awareness of women's social and cultural status and that they should benefit from an atmosphere conducive to their intellectual progress. In that regard, the role of the mass media, educational facilities, non-discriminatory legislation and administrative directives could not be overemphasized. The participation of women in social and cultural activities was thus encouraged, and the Government was particularly concerned to ensure protection of children and single mothers with low incomes, and also elderly and disabled women. In that connection it should be noted that the Consultative Assembly had recently approved a bill on the protection of women and children.

68. The World Conference on Human Rights, the international Conference on Population and Development, the 1994 international year of the family and the 1995 World Conference on Women would provide Governments, international organizations and the United Nations with the opportunity to work collectively in order to implement the key provisions of the Forward-looking Strategies, to exchange experience and to make preparations for the future.

69. Ms. ARUNGU OLENDE (Kenya) said that the advancement of women was one area in which the United Nations had achieved slow and lacklustre progress, in particular with regard to the situation of women in the Secretariat who, as at 30 June 1992, occupied 30.6 per cent of posts subject to geographical distribution. Not a single woman occupied a post at the level of Under-Secretary-General, although two years previously there had been two.

70. Referring to the Secretary-General's report on enhancement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/47/508), her delegation proposed that other United Nations bodies should accelerate the recruitment of Africans, and more specifically African women, and increase the resources provided for staff development.

71. As indicated in other reports of the Secretary-General, devoted respectively to implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 (A/47/377) and the Advancement of Women (A/47/340), the efforts being made to ensure recognition of all the

(Ms. Arungu Olende, Kenya)

rights of women and their role represented a continuing struggle in which the slightest sign of relaxation or lack of vigilance could subvert such progress as had already been achieved.

72. In respect of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, efforts must be made to ensure that it would be more productive than the previous three conferences. During the preparatory period lessons should be drawn from past mistakes. For instance, at the Nairobi Conference, over 100 resolutions had been produced without sufficient time to discuss them, and they had not been discussed so far. Nairobi had at least proved that the stream of resolutions had been useless because it duplicated the Forward-looking Strategies, which had covered almost all the same topics. Therefore, at the Beijing Conference, it would be sufficient to produce a similar document which could be a Platform for Action. That proposal should be considered quickly, since it would have a definite effect on budgeting and planning for preparatory meetings for the Conference.

73. Her delegation had submitted the periodic report of Kenya to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which would consider it in January 1993. That report painted a realistic picture of what Kenya had done in implementation not only of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women but also of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000.

74. Regarding the contribution of women to sustainable development, the Director of UNIFEM had already commented that the Rio Conference had given prominent consideration to the status of women because of the efforts of women, especially through non-governmental organizations from all parts of the world. Women must be given an appropriate level of representation in any body - a commission on sustainable development, for example - eventually established to consolidate the outcome of that important conference. The efforts of UNIFEM to assist women's programme in environmentally friendly development, from the promotion of energy-saving stoves in the Sahel region in the 1980s to tree-planting campaigns, should be congratulated. Other institutions concerned with development, such as UNDP, the World Bank and non-governmental organizations, should do more to assist women, especially those living in developing countries, particularly in Africa, to meet the challenges posed by environmental degradation.

75. Women and children made up between 60 and 80 per cent of refugees and displaced persons in Africa. That situation had reached crisis proportions, especially in the Horn of Africa. UNIFEM must pay greater attention to the problems of refugee women in close cooperation with UNHCR, UNDP and the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Kenya had in the past taken in more than a half million refugees fleeing civil strife in neighbouring countries. Assistance to refugee and displaced women should be directed towards the local communities and host countries, because the need to share food and natural resources often led to degradation of land and reduced incomes.

(Ms. Arungu Olende, Kenya)

76. The phrase "feminization of poverty", referring to poverty specifically affecting women, applied currenty to the low-paying, dead-end jobs which they often held. Although on average women worked more hours a day than most men, they often found themselves at the low end of the pay scale. That form of discrimination based on gender could lead to further degradation in the status of women unless there was greater awareness.

77. Mrs. AGGREY-ORLEANS (Ghana) said that the Declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women had been historic because it was the first time that the international community had attempted to take action both at the national and the international levels to promote the advancement of women from the viewpoint of the elimination of gender inequalities and the full participation of women in development and in the search for peace. The adoption of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in 1985 showed a recognition of the limited achievements of the Decade. At its thirty-fourth session, the Commission on the Status of Women had once again been forced to report a general lack of progress in achieving the objectives of equality, development and peace.

78. In its resolution 46/98, the General Assembly had reaffirmed its determination to encourage the full participation of women in economic, social, cultural, civil and political affairs and to promote development, cooperation and international peace. To that end, it called for an improved pace in the implementation of the Strategies in the crucial last decade of the twentieth century, since the cost to societies of failing to implement the Strategies would be high in terms of slowed economic and social development, misuse of human resources and reduced progress for society as a whole.

79. On their part, the Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, meeting at Jakarta for their tenth Conference, had stated that the full and equal integration of women into the development process at all levels was a central goal of the Movement. Moreover, in its report on the work of its thirty-second session before the current General Assembly, the Committee for Programme and Coordination had expressed its disappointment at the minimal reference to the role of women in development under the System-Wide Plan of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development for the use of United Nations agencies in execution of activities arising from those two concerns. The Committee had recommended that the omission should be redressed by including, in particular, access of women to the decision-making level.

80. The "opportunity regained" of which the Secretary-General had so eloquently spoken in his report on the work of the Organization (A/47/1) would have little meaning for half the world's population - its women - unless the advancement of women ceased to be an empty phrase. Along those lines, the fact that the Fourth World Conference on Women would be held during the fiftieth anniversary year of the United Nations was quite symbolic. Because its Charter reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and

(Mrs. Aggrey-Orleans, Ghana)

worth of the human person, equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, the United Nations could not help but make the advancement of women one of its primary objectives. Renewed efforts were required to implement the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, by placing particular attention on the priorities defined by the General Assembly in resolution 46/98 with regard to national policies and programmes.

81. Those priorities had been the basis of Ghana's policy for the advancement of women, with emphasis laid on empowering them to gain control over their own lives. Education had a primary role to play, and the equal access of girls to education, which was far from being achieved, must be considered a priority. The direct relationship between education and human development, and consequently economic and social development, had inspired a long history of adult education programmes for women, spanning basic education, home management and preparation for gainful employment. The Department of Community Development, which ran women's training institutes, targeted rural women.

82. As part of the current educational reforms, the Non-Formal Education Division within the Ministry of Education was spearheading efforts to eradicate illiteracy in Ghana by the year 2000. Its programmes were specially conceived to be sensitive to the particular needs of women. Its work had been complemented by the activities of another important government agency, the National Council on Women and Development, the thrust of which was to integrate women fully into the development process as both agents and beneficiaries.

83. UNIFEM had cooperated with the National Council on Women and Development in introducing rural women to innovative programmes that would enable them to engage in better-paid and less drudgery-filled activities, by training them in such subjects as management and accounting in small-scale industry. The Council also did research on all facets of women's lives with a view to making recommendations to the Government for the advancement of women. The Council had received generous funding from other multilateral organizations and from bilateral sources.

84. A number of non-governmental organizations in Ghana were also active in promoting the advancement of women. The 31 December Women's Movement, for instance, mobilized women at the grass-roots level for projects seeking to improve their standard of living. Also, The Ghana Federation of Women Lawyers had done much to promote the welfare of women and children by raising public awareness of the purposes and principles of the United Nations in their legal and social aspects.

85. Her Government's human development strategy fully recognized the close symbiosis between educational achievement, health for all, nutrition, food security, safe water supply, sanitation and housing, and the strategies proposed to achieve those goals addressed the specific needs of women.

(Mrs. Aggrey-Orleans, Ghana)

86. In the area of peace, her delegation remained convinced that women could make a significant difference in political life, both nationally and internationally, on an equal basis with men, in decision-making as well. In Ghana, women's participation in public and political life was restricted mainly by their lack of education and by the multiple roles society expected them to perform. The country's new Constitution, however, in whose drafting women had participated through their representation at the Consultative Assembly, increased their participation. The 31 December Women's Movement had, moreover, spared no effort in encouraging women, particularly rural women, to take part in political life. The hope was that the efforts to have women assume responsibilities at the national level would lead to the recruitment of many more women from developing countries.

87. Obviously the advancement of women could not be separated from the international environment, particularly the international economic order. The end of the cold war was indeed an opportunity regained. Her delegation looked forward to a sharpened focus on the sustainable development of the developing countries and their full integration into the world economy. That was the prerequisite for the advancement of women.

88. Mrs. VILLAROEL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) observed that women, who represented half the world, constituted two thirds of the one billion illiterates and two thirds of the workforce, and one per cent of the landowners; furthermore, they had only 10 per cent of the global income. Under its mandate, UNESCO was working for equality of opportunity in education, science, culture and communication, and was targeting women, Africa and the least developed countries. It sought to promote literacy and basic education for girls and women, give them access to scientific and technical education, and ensure their participation in development, the protection of the environment and the preservation of the cultural heritage, as both agents and beneficiaries.

89. UNESCO action on behalf of women was conducted at four levels: normative activities, implementing the resolutions and conventions adopted by the General Conference; study and research activities of all kinds, such as its assessment of 20 years of population education, or the study done in Greece on drugs used by female secondary school pupils as part of a preventive education programme against drug abuse; training activities aimed at helping to improve the status of women in UNESCO fields of competence; and operational activities involving the execution of projects in various countries financed from the regular budget or with extrabudgetary funds.

90. With particular reference to training in all its forms and at all levels, the campaign to eliminate illiteracy by the year 2000 was far from over. Many functional literacy projects and civic education projects for women have been set up in different regions of the world. UNESCO provided travel and study grants to women from the developing countries to allow them to take training courses in the sciences or to attend international conferences. It organized

(Mrs. Villaroel, UNESCO)

seminars and conferences on the environment, two of which had recently been assigned to women; it promoted the participation of women in the communications sector and had just included in its budget a new type of activity, the organizing of summer universities for women. As part of the fight against the procuring and forced prostitution of women, a plan of action had been launched based on the recommendations of the Committee of Experts who had met at Pennsylvania State University in the United States at the invitation of UNESCO.

91. UNESCO intended to take part in the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women, bearing in mind the priorities mentioned earlier. The outcome of the specific activities to improve the status of women in the various programme sectors - education, the social and human sciences, science, culture and communication - would constitute UNESCO's input to the World Conference.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.